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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 000999

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KISL](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: PHILIPPINES HITS HOME RUN WITH FIRST-EVER REGIONAL
DISASTER RELIEF EXERCISE

Classified By: Amb. Kristie A. Kenney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Philippines hosted the first-ever ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) field exercise May 4-8, a voluntary disaster relief demonstration, which involved 25 of 26 ARF nations and the European Union. The week-long event was an unqualified success. The primary goal of the civilian-led and military-supported exercise was to demonstrate ARF nation capabilities in response to an affected nation's request for assistance following a major natural disaster. The exercise identified regional assistance capacity within ASEAN and the ARF and may serve as a template in the future for multinational relief operations. The exercise also tested the Philippine-UN disaster coordination mechanism and featured a roundtable evaluation of the procedural challenges and outcomes of the exercise. Senior Philippine officials were effusive in their gratitude to Ambassador for the significant assistance provided by U.S. military and civilian personnel in the planning and execution of the exercise. END SUMMARY.

COORDINATED PLANNING PAYS OFF

¶2. (C) After more than a year of planning, the Philippines hosted the first-ever ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) field exercise, a week-long Voluntary Display of Response for Disaster Relief held May 4-8. From the outset of planning in early 2008, the primary goal of this civilian-led and military-supported exercise, as conceived by U.S. and Philippine planners, was to demonstrate ARF nation capabilities in response to an affected nation's request for assistance following a major natural disaster, such as a typhoon or earthquake. Numerous legal and logistical challenges had to be overcome in the course of moving the exercise from concept to reality, including determining protocols for allowing foreign military personnel to participate in an exercise in the Philippines without a legal agreement governing their status. U.S. Marine Forces Pacific (MARFORPAC), Pacific Command (PACOM), State Department and Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) personnel worked closely with their Philippine civilian and military counterparts for more than 15 months to plan and implement a highly successful event that included 25 of the 26 ARF nations and the European Union. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea was the sole ARF member that did not send either participants or observers to the exercise.

STRONG MULTILATERAL PARTICIPATION

¶3. (SBU) Ambassador attended the opening ceremony in Manila May 4, which featured Philippine Executive Secretary Eduardo

Ermita as guest of honor. The ceremony centered around a display of maritime disaster response coordination and featured combined elements of the Philippine Navy, Coast Guard, Office of Civil Defense, and Department of Health, as well as the Japanese Self Defense Forces, who integrated an advanced rescue seaplane into the operation. The exercise activities continued throughout the week with four multinational engineering projects and three medical events that benefited thousands of Philippine citizens. Philippine Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo told the Ambassador May 8 that he was delighted with the outcome of the ARF exercise and the attendance by EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Scot Marciel and Japanese Vice Minister of Defense Nobuo Kishi, in particular. Romulo commented that it would be useful to build on the lessons learned this year and hoped another nation would volunteer to host a follow-on ARF disaster relief exercise next year (septel).

14. (SBU) Secretary of National Defense Gilberto Teodoro and DAS Marciel represented the Philippine and U.S. governments at projects in the Clark and Olongapo areas during the May 6 VIP day. Secretary Teodoro lauded the spirit of cooperation and friendship evident among the participants and thanked the U.S. for its role as a co-sponsor of the event. DAS Marciel congratulated the Philippines for its leadership in making the exercise a success, stating the event had exceeded all expectations.

TANGIBLE RESULTS

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15. (SBU) The combined efforts of the 13 contributor nations and the European Union dramatically improved the livelihood for the residents of the target communities. Participants completely refurbished two elementary schools, built a 60-meter suspension bridge across a flood-prone waterway for a hilltop community frequently stranded during heavy rains, and constructed a deep water well, pump house, and 5,000 gallon water storage facility for a village that previously lacked potable water. In addition, more than 9,500 patients received medical and dental treatment, including surgery.

COMMENT

16. (C) With the ARF exercise following a week after the conclusion of the largest U.S.-Philippine bilateral military exercise of the year, the Philippine government was concerned the public might misconstrue the ARF disaster relief demonstration as a military-led endeavor. Prior to, and throughout the event, the Philippine National Disaster Coordinating Council, which was the lead civilian agency for the ARF exercise, emphasized the multilateral nature of the event and the importance of it as an inaugural example of visible cooperation among ARF nations. Numerous representatives from ARF countries commented that the exercise was much larger in scale than they had anticipated and that it would be valuable to hold similar exercises in the future to cement the ties that had been established among colleagues during planning process and actual exercise itself. The U.S. and other multinational military planners played an invaluable role in bringing about the ARF exercise, but deftly took a backseat to the civilian representatives and let them manage the public information campaign. The Philippines took a huge first step toward better regional integration by hosting the this ARF disaster relief exercise.

KENNEY